

REMARKS

Applicants appreciate the thorough examination of the present application that is reflected in the Official Action of December 14, 2005 (the "Action"). Applicants also appreciate the Examiner's indication that Claim 12 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form and that Claims 27, 29, 31-36 and 38-68 are allowed.

Applicants appreciate the courtesies extended by Examiner Rhonda S. Peace to the undersigned during a telephone interview January 10, 2006. As discussed in the interview, Applicants respectfully request consideration of the above amendments and submit that all pending claims are in condition for allowance for at least the reasons discussed below.

All pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Claims 1, 4, 9-11 and 20 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103 over various references. Applicants have amended the claims above to place the claims in a form generally indicated as allowable to expedite issuance of the present application as a patent. Such amendments are made without prejudice to Applicants' right to file a continuation and/or divisional application directed to the previously presented claims.

In particular, Claim 1 has been amended to include certain recitations indicated to be allowable on page 5 of the Action and as generally recited in allowable Claim 12. Applicants note that the fixing mechanism includes a non-circular orifice, and that a coupling of the fixing element to the cleaving mechanism by the non-circular orifice noted on page 5, lines 9-11 of the Action is not recited in original Claim 12 or any intervening claim. *See Original Claims 11-12 and page 7, line 9 of the Specification.* Accordingly, Claim 1 has been amended to recite as follows: "the fixing mechanism includes a non-circular orifice configured to receive the fixing element therein, the fixing element having a corresponding non-circular cross section." In addition, the "closing means" identified on page 5 of the Action is not a limitation of allowable Claim 12. A closing means was generally recited in original Claim 13, which is canceled. This recitation has been rewritten in new Claim 70.

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The recitation of "a lifetime indicator ..." has been deleted from Claim 1 and rewritten in dependent form in Claim 69. Claim 12 has been amended for consistency. Applicants submit that Claim 1 is in condition for allowance and that Claims 4 and 9-12 are allowable at least per the allowability of Claim 1.

Accordingly, Applicants submit that the pending claims are in condition for allowance.

Comments on Statement of Reasons for Allowance.

Applicants note that the Examiner's statement of reasons for allowance includes language generally tracking portions of different ones of the allowed independent claims. Applicants understand that the Examiner has provided generalized comments but that each of the independent claims is patentable in light of the respective recitations contained in those claims.

For the reasons discussed above, Applicants submit that the application is in condition for allowance, and a Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested in due course.

Respectfully submitted,

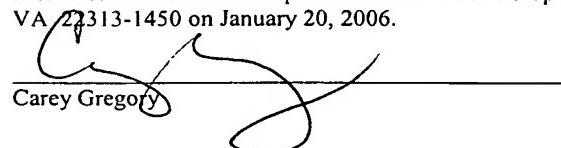


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